

TEACHING MODULE

THE

FUTURE

OF

FASHION



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

LEVI STRAUSS & CO.

# THE FUTURE OF FASHION: SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH THE LENS OF THE FASHION INDUSTRY\*

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In the fashion industry, success requires highly-developed sourcing, design, manufacturing, and marketing chains. Increasingly, success also means incorporating sustainability in resource and labor management as well, as firms realize that long-term corporate survival will depend on new ways of doing business.

Given the growing world population, declining resources, and unsustainable practices common in the industry, it is clear that the fashion industry will need a redesign to effectively prepare for the future.

This Teaching Module discusses topics that will shape the future of the fashion industry, including sustainable resource management, the challenges and opportunities of global growth, workforce management, and the role of ethical consumption in business. Since other industries face the same challenges and opportunities, the lessons embedded in this module have applicability far beyond the companies that design, produce and sell the clothes we wear.

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# RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

Issues of resource sustainability are increasingly important to businesses as factors like climate change and non-environmental methods affect resource viability, and increasing demand for material drains existing stocks.

Companies concerned with the viability of their business models are being forced to consider where previously “inexhaustible” supplies will come from, and societies are increasingly concerned that socially and environmentally sustainable practices be followed, and are establishing laws to enforce them.

The fashion industry already faces a number of resource-related issues, and in the future will have to develop ways in which to address problems of waste management, energy efficiency, pesticide and other pollution, emissions, and the lifecycle of the finished product. The integrity of the water

and soil used in production has significant impacts not only on the lives of those directly involved in the supply chain, but also on the future availability of those essential resources and the operations of firms which use them.

Fashion products can have significant environmental effects throughout their lifecycle, and this section examines some of the largest areas of impact, including textile production, care, and disposal, and how firms are beginning to address issues of environmental performance throughout the supply chain.

In addition to strategies like improved energy efficiency, alternative inputs and streamlined supply chains, future solutions to these issues may also include using technology to remap the production process in new and innovative ways. Consumers are also part of the resource challenge, opening the discussion on more sustainable ways to care for clothes post-sale. If resource pressures continue, firms positioned for long-term success will be those that find innovative ways to reduce their environmental impact through more efficient use of resources, the use of organic materials, the creation of more environmentally-friendly alternatives, improved technologies, recycling, and effective knowledge management to allow the incorporation of innovation into their operations. Such efficiencies will ensure continued resource availability on a broad scale, but also better position the individual company for success by bolstering their competitive advantage. Adapting to the realities of resource constraints can only benefit firms as they look to the future.

Resources are finite and lifecycle and other initiatives are critical to finding innovative approaches to a sustainable future. Companies are often several steps removed from their raw material suppliers, and while individual firms can lead the way, broad change in the future will likely require collaborative public and private efforts on an industry-wide scale.

## Teaching Cases:

### Deja Shoe (A, B) [Case]

Deja Shoe's founder and new management team want to develop a business strategy based on pro-environment principles to enable the firm to out-compete established industry players Nike and Timberland.

### Marks & Spencer [Case]

As the economic downturn impacts on retail business, Richard Gillies, head of M&S's new sustainability plan Plan A, is asked to create a business case for the different initiatives to move forward.

### 'Green Cleaning' through Soap of Environmental Consciousness and Water of Social Consciousness [Mini-Case]

Green Clean Inc. is an example of how high quality customer service, productive work environment and a healthier planet are goals that buttress each other.

### Planet, People and Profit: Breaking through the Finish-Line of the Race [Mini-Case]

Brooks Sports, Inc. is a footwear company committed to environmental sustainability in all of its business channels including product design, packaging, and distribution.

### Sustainability Management at Nau Inc [Case]

Nau was created by senior management from an outdoor apparel company and founded around sustainability concerns.

## Articles, Reports, and Working Papers:

### 15 Minutes with Hannah Jones [Article]

What goes in and out of fashion changes continually, and the apparel industry likes it that way because it creates a constant demand for new products. But it also poses a challenge for Nike as

the company attempts to reduce its environmental footprint and become greener.

### Cambodian Factories Seek Eco-Friendly Power Alternatives [Article]

Cambodian garment factories evaluate the environmental and financial costs of their energy use and test alternatives for reducing energy use.

### Cleaner Production in the Textile Industry, Lessons from the Danish Experience [Working Paper]

Introduces the concept of cleaner production, a preventative environmental strategy, and how it can be applied in the textile manufacturing process.

### Innovation and Knowledge Adoption for Local Fibres in the Value Chain: The Story of 'White Gold' from Uzbekistan [Working Paper]

Examines Uzbekistan's relationship with cotton and discusses possibilities to develop their commodity export market into a more value-added industry.

### The CEO Water Mandate [Essay]

The leaders of six of the world's largest companies have issued a call to action urging fellow business leaders to take immediate action to address the emerging global water crisis.

### The REI-ght Stuff [Article]

The outdoors equipment and clothes retailer takes a long-term look at sustainability, including the challenges of paper usage, waste reduction, packaging and product stewardship.

### Waste Couture: Environmental Impact of the Clothing Industry [Article]

This report provides an overview of the environmental impact that clothing can have during its life cycle, from material creation to manufacturing to care and disposal.

### Weaving Businesses Together [Article]

Organic Exchange, a non-profit organization, uses market forces to create a transparent network through which buyers and sellers can purchase organic cotton.

## Supplemental Reading:

### Freshwater Resources: Managing the Risks Facing the Private Sector [Report]

Discusses the future outlook for the management and conservation of water with regard to challenges that all industries will face in the future.

### Impact of Textiles and Clothing Industry on the Environment: Approach Towards Eco-Friendly Textiles [Article]

Provides a summary and introduction of sustainable textiles that are currently in development or on the market.

### Mapping of Evidence on Sustainable Development Impacts That Occur in the Life Cycles of Clothing [Report]

A comprehensive overview of the environmental impacts created during the entire life cycle of clothing.

### One CEO's Trip From Dismissive to Convinced [Article]

Describes the journey of a leading carpet production company, Interface, in its quest to create a largely renewable textile and engage in more sustainable production and distribution practices.

### Sustainability Report from the International Association for Soaps, Detergent, and Maintenance Products [Report]

A cleaning industry viewpoint on how to be proactive in addressing consumer concern over sustainability and environmental issues.